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EXTRACTS FROM THE LAST REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE CHICAGO VACA- TION SCHOOLS

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The first Chicago vacation school was opened in the summer of 1896 in the Joseph Medill School building, under the auspices of the Civic Federation. In the summer of 1897 Miss Mary McDowell, of the Chicago University Settlement, opened a school in the Seward School building, the funds being contributed by Mrs. Emmons Blaine and Mrs. Marian Sturges. In 1898 five schools were supported by the women's clubs of Cook County. In 1899 the Chicago Permanent Vacation School and Playgrounds Committee of Women's Clubs was formed for the purpose of providing funds for the vacation schools until such time as the Chicago Board of Education should decide to support them, and that committee has provided nearly all the funds up to the present time, with the exception of \$6,000 contributed by the Board of Education. In order to conduct the schools in a thorough manner, a Vacation School Board, made up of educational experts and representatives of the women's clubs, took over the active management of the schools, and has conducted them ever since.

The vacation schools have a triple function: first, to remove children from the evil influences of the street during the summer; second, to give them a taste of country life by means of excursions; and third, to serve as experimental stations for the public schools, where educators may have an opportunity to try new ideas without demoralizing the regular day schools, and where normal-school cadets may receive practical experience in teaching.

Weekly excursions into the country are among the most important features of vacation schools. There the children study nature at first hand, collect material for classroom work, and try their hands at reproducing the scenes with colors or pencil, besides

having a happy time. Perhaps the most important result is the stirring of new interests in the minds of the pupils. It is a notable fact that no accidents or other disagreeable features, except slight showers, have ever interrupted the plan of excursions, while the discipline maintained by the principals and teachers has been most excellent.

As experimental stations for the public schools, the vacation schools are accomplishing much good. To quote from the report for 1903:

In Chicago the vacation schools helped to give impetus to the movement which had for its object the introduction of manual training into all grades of the elementary schools. Many of our most successful teachers of construction work in the public schools received their first lessons in basketry, iron-work, and light wood-work from pupils who had been taught in the vacation schools.

Many cadets serve in the vacation schools each summer, and there is no doubt that the practical experience they acquire is of very great value to them when they begin regular teaching in the public schools. The qualifications necessary for a good vacation-school teacher are peculiar. Personality and interest in the work are the most important factors to be considered. At present the teachers in the vacation schools are all taken from the Chicago public schools and are chosen with the greatest care.

The curriculum for the vacation schools, which was put in force several years ago, has been found to be such an excellent one that very little change has ever been made in it except to amplify the treatment of some of the subjects. In every school the following departments were maintained: kindergarten, physical culture, elementary manual training, advanced manual training, sewing, nature-study, music, and drawing. Cooking was taught in the Jones, Hamline, Washington, Burr, and Dante Schools; the Burr School gave special attention to a vegetable garden; the Dante and the Jones Schools inaugurated housekeeping departments; while the Washington School made a specialty of printing, pottery, and clay-modeling. The work of the kindergarten was so much like that of the public schools that no special attention will be devoted to it in this report, further than to say that the teachers were unusually efficient.

In most of the vacation schools the work in physical culture was hampered by lack of gymnastic apparatus and space for games and drills. It would be well, of course, to give all physical training out of doors, but this is not practical except at the Burr School. There the yards are large and well equipped with apparatus. In the Ghetto district, and in the Italian district just north of it, we found that many of the children knew very little about play, and that the few games the boys knew were anything but lively. Teachers found at the beginning of the term that these pupils were slow to respond to instruction in gymnastics, but before the close of the term they were lively and boisterous enough to please the most strenuous advocate of physical culture.

The sewing department was one of the most popular in the schools. The work was made very practical, and it was appreciated so highly by the pupils and parents that we had great difficulty in securing enough samples of the finished product to make a good showing at the vacation-school exhibit in the Art Institute. Primary sewing was abolished; for it seems a waste of time and energy to attempt to teach the little children to sew something that will be useless when finished; besides, their eyes and hands are totally unfitted for such work. Older children were taught hand-sewing during the early part of the term, and when the teachers thought the pupils were ready for the sewing-machine, they were taught how to use it.

The work in elementary manual training was unusually satisfactory, because of its great variety and the skill with which it was executed. Teachers were warned to avoid making useless things merely for their so-called beauty, and the number of beautiful, substantial articles taken home to parents and friends as a result of this training was remarkable. Among these were card-cases, hand-bags, and belts made of leather; boxes, tool-chests, and doll-houses made of wood; trays, plates, pencil-holders, sconces, and lanterns made of hammered brass, copper, and iron; baskets, mats, and dolls' hats made of raffia.

In the advanced manual-training department special attention was also given to the making of useful articles, thus relating the work as far as possible with the home. Boys were taught not

only how to repair furniture, but how to make it, and much of the mission furniture made in the schools would do credit to a fairly good mechanic. The exhibit of manual-training work at the Art Institute was so good that the sale of a few articles more than paid for the expense of the exhibit.

The pottery work at the Washington School is regarded as a branch of manual training in which special aid is given to the development of the æsthetic taste. The pupil first makes the design of his object in charcoal, colored crayon, or water color, and then attempts a reproduction of this design in plaster or clay. Four methods of work are used: hand-modeling, casting process, throwing-on process, and the Indian method of coiling. All the work is done by the children except the firing, which of course has to be done by an expert; but it is done in the school, where the process can be seen by the children.

The work in nature-study is very difficult for the teachers because of the great lack of material in the crowded districts. Those who live in the suburbs carry to the schools vast quantities of material, but where this material is not available simple lessons in physics and chemistry are given. The conditions for nature-study at the Burr School are almost ideal, owing to the large vegetable garden. This garden is marked off in plats for each room, as indicated in the annexed diagram. Seeding is done in May by public-school children, and the garden is cared for during the summer by pupils of the vacation school. Much of the material used in the cooking-room is obtained from this garden.

The outline of music prepared by Miss Marie Hofer in 1900 gives an excellent idea of the work we have attempted in this art:

The character of the vacation-school music should be recreative, vitalizing, refreshing, to develop the mind while the spirit of song should prevail. For this reason, no formal music teaching will be done, no books will be used. Only such songs will be used as will have a direct bearing upon, and relation to, the daily experiences of the children. In connection with this work of the school, patriotic and national songs will be chosen with reference to the prevailing nationalities of the neighborhood. This will involve history of race, folk-songs, and dances. A special correlation of music and rhythm will be made, with the effort to utilize the impulses gained through the music in rhythmic expression as a basis for physical training.

The work in the drawing department is to a great extent based on the experience gained by the children through their excursions to the country. The art work varies greatly in the different schools, but the outline of art work in the Foster School will give a fair idea of what is done in the others. To quote from this outline:

The objects of the art work are: to cultivate an appreciation of beauty in form, color, and arrangement; to give a sense of pleasure in the knowledge of some artistic creation; to give actual knowledge of the fundamental truths governing form, color, and composition. The materials used were clay for modeling, colored crayon, water color, paper, and scissors.

The establishment of the housekeeping department at the Dante School was an extension of the curriculum, forced on us by the needs of the people of the district. The best idea of the work in the housekeeping department can be obtained from the report of Miss Susan Hayward, the teacher in charge:

If it is true that the purpose of education is to teach us how to live, it would seem best to begin our teaching in the home—not in an ideal home, nor in an imaginary home, but in the real home. “The hand that rocks the cradle” should be a clean hand, trained to do clean work. But where can this training be obtained? Obviously, for thousands of the poor, only in the public schools. It was the need of the people for training in domestic science that led to the experiment of the housekeeping department in the Chicago vacation schools. Cooking and sewing have been taught in these schools for several years, but the housekeeping course was adopted in 1904.

Inspection of the neighborhood of the Dante School, in a congested Italian district, led the teachers and principals to believe that two rooms represented the average home. This problem then presented itself: Given two rooms, whitewashed walls, bare floors, bare windows, unwholesome environment, money limited to the meager income of the wage-earner, and the time of the teacher’s work limited to six weeks, to find some way of interesting the people to make better homes.

The basement of the school furnished bare floors, bare windows, whitewashed walls, and one room. The needle, with the aid of hairpins and numerous yards of dark-green burlap, provided a partition. This partition separated the basement into a kitchen, living-room, bedroom, and dining-room. Thin scrim curtains covered the lower sash, and dark-green wall paper, tacked above the scrim, gave a pleasing effect to the whole room. Dressing-case, wash-stand, bed, one rocker, and a discarded bench made up the furniture of the room; yet here eighty girls were taught to care for a bedroom, and eighty pairs of clean hands smoothed, patted, and tucked that bed after the most approved fashion.

But beds and curtains do not remain clean long in Chicago, and so washing and ironing became necessary. A little three-burner gas stove supplied the heat, and eighty girls were taught to wash and iron the necessary clothing of this model house—not a doll-play wash, but the real thing, a regular day in a regular way.

The chief charm of this new, beautiful basement home was the dining-room. A cheap pine table, covered between meals with green burlap, was adorned with a ginger jar or a green bottle. Here, in classes of twenty, the girls set and reset the table with careful precision. Iron-stone dishes of ordinary blue were placed carefully on a snow-white cloth, smoothly ironed to a satiny sheen by the hands of the pupils. Nor was this a useless setting; for guests were served, and each pupil was trained to serve as well as to set the table. In the kitchen, beyond the green curtain partition, these eighty girls were taught to cook simple wholesome foods: the cereals, soups, potatoes, tea and coffee. Dish-washing, sweeping, scrubbing, dusting followed, when, presto! change. The dining-table vanished, and a study graced what had now become a sitting-room, containing a long bench filled with burlap-covered pillows, a few chairs, a book-rack, some flowers, one good picture, and a plate-rack. Not much—only a few dollars expended; nothing that the child did not or could not have in her home; not much—only eighty girls filled with enthusiasm for housekeeping; not much—only the beginning of eighty homes; not much—only the shaping of eighty lives; not much, yet all.

The value of vacation schools is proved by the very great yearly increase in daily attendance, the enrolment increasing from about 700 in 1896 to 6,847 in 1904. To quote again from the vacation-school report for 1903:

It is quite useless to attempt to estimate the number of pupils who would attend the vacation schools if they had the opportunity. Hundreds are turned away from each school each year, and it is safe to say that at least thirty schools in our foreign district would be crowded with children if the Vacation School Board could afford to open that many schools.

Every day during the past summer barefooted children walked miles to the office of the superintendent of the vacation schools in the hope that they might melt his heart and secure a ticket to the schools; and it was not an unusual thing to find several parents waiting in the office for the coveted tickets of admission for their children.

It is hoped that before many years the Board of Education will have funds enough to carry on the work that has been so long supported by the women's clubs. When this is accomplished, the

schools will have a permanency that they now lack, and, in many respects, their efficiency will be greatly improved. The annual appropriation would be made early, and teachers engaged so far in advance of the summer term that their work could be thoroughly planned. Until the board is ready to take over this work, it is hoped that the women's clubs will continue to support the schools as generously as they have done in the past.

A very gratifying feature of the schools of 1904 was the interest shown in them by the British vice-consul, who, at the request of his government, made a thorough examination of our schools. The results are embodied in a consular report of some length, excerpts from which have appeared in many of the leading papers of Great Britain with editorials on the work of the Chicago vacation schools.